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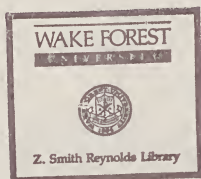
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The Student

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

FALL 1993



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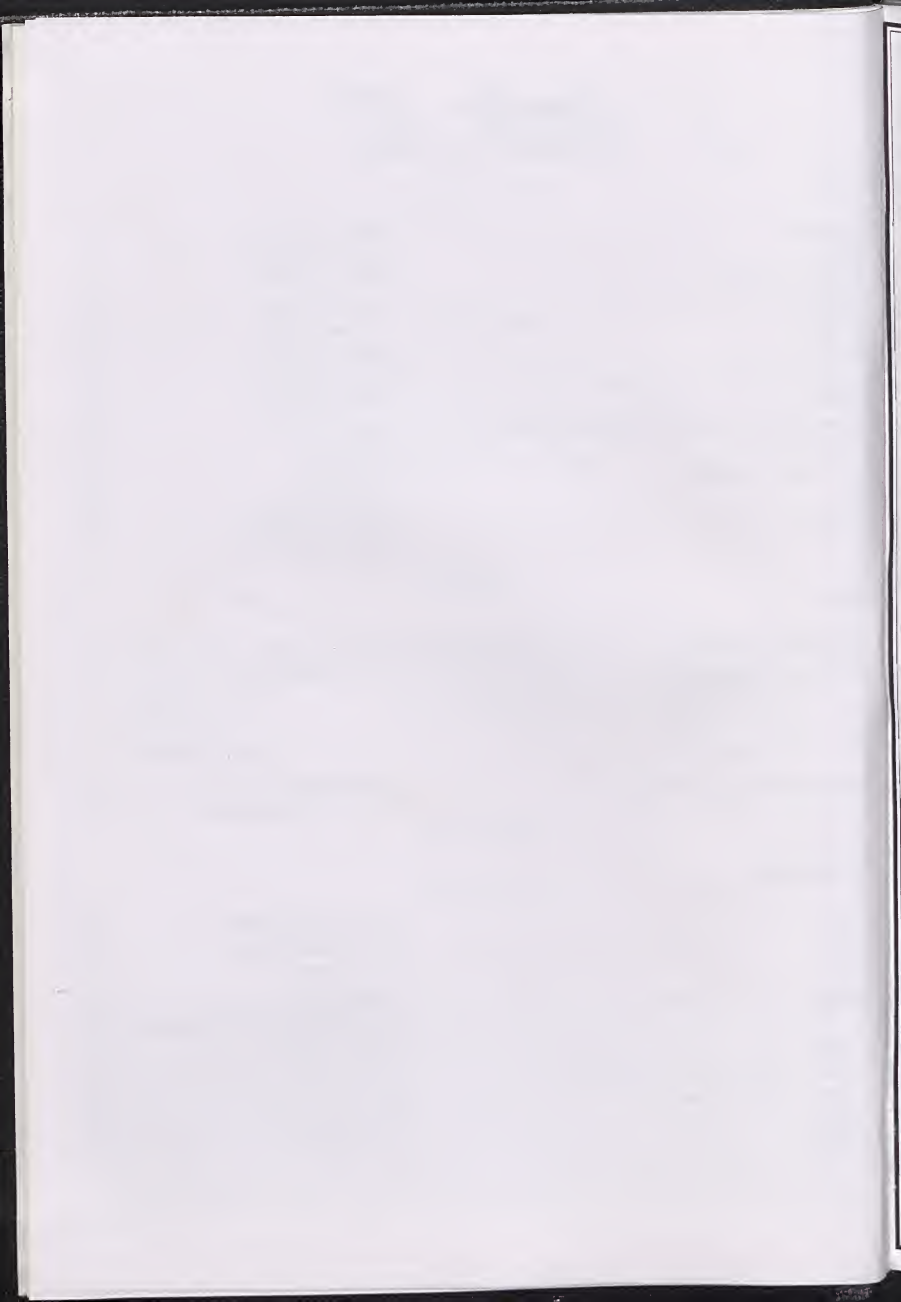
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Poetry



Placement

Here, it's as if I'd never breathed
in the monsoon air of another world
never thought slowly, never contemplated
my own hot breath and its sweet release.

Here, when I speak of my books
I can see you've never stayed up
cigarette-sober, eyes burning until 4am
when you extinguish some fragrant candle.

Here, it's as if I'd never walked alone, unafraid,
hiked hills through sunflowers and heat
my head bowed only to some star's power
seeking the spot where God planned the universe.

Here, when I walk, when I speak
your words, your stares blank but full
leave me more empty, more alone than the pale pink
five-petalled flower I found picked and discarded on top of that hill
and placed in my hair.

Camus

I picture you, in a Moroccan setting.
Under a hot sun,
Writing about heat.

Your pen, a philosophical scalpel,
declaring victory in the day's closing.
Ready for that stone to roll down a hill in hell.

You enjoyed not the intricacy of thought,
but taking things for what they were.
A good smoke and a day at the beach.

I picture you, much like Mersault;
your favorite wine,
and a man bent on his own doom.

"Notice how he mentions heat seven times in the paragraph."
Mme. Perrin would say.
That heat would start a fire.

The hot sun woke up my mind,
made me realize that I was young
and thinking.

I went by your grave last year and
asked the air why
someone would be so bitter and logical.

Was life a plague?
The automobile was yours,
run by heat.

And I was vexed
when we read about your
disillusionment with being disillusioned.

Being existential was a full-time job meant for the hypothetical man

Yeaahh you Know!

I want a real sexual revolution,
a drawn out death and power to the masses
fight.

I want to see us fight in true emotionless sex,
Kids running in the streets
Bathed in pornography to show their support.

I want to be a warrior, trying to uphold sixties morals,
the pill as a sacrament.

and there I will be:
Armed with porno and fire.
Guns and my genitals
Fearing no one
Making the prudent run

And I want the last steps of this revolution to be mine
Walking up the steps of the White House,
Showing my endowment to The Man

in support of the freedom
we have lost.

The Kiss

What is in a kiss
That draws them
So close
Like two horses mating
When you can't tell where one ends
And the other begins
Their hair like Medusa's
Knots with one another's
His neck so long
Makes up for hers
Her head pushed down
Like a stump
What is this love
That makes them one
That makes them so eternal

My Child

She looks like a voodoo doll
Needles sticking out of
Everywhere
Her heels bruised
From being pierced

A mother wants
To hold her child
Hear her laugh
But she is too fragile
For this childhood play

She will die
In a plastic coffin
She will never
See the sun
Or feel the wind
Against her back

She will sleep
And feel her most alive
Though dead
And I
Will miss the fire
In her cheeks
And her wondering eyes
But I
Must let her go
I am
Her mother

Bedtime

The last thing I think about when I think about death
is

The white sheet
they pull over your head
like I did when I was little and scared

Hiding

In my bed
It was so cold
Air-conditioner on

High

Stuffed creatures outlining my body

and

The white sheet I
Pulled over my

Head

Six Weeks in Idaho

Planting falcons

records and notations left unheeded
piled next to the clothes that
sloughed off in the heat
and the loneliness,

playing with animals
(they don't play back),

the flies
attracted like nothing else
come whispering,

and the trees
a thousand chaperones watching,

singing
off-key but strong
waiting for echoes

Novelty

regrets
of moments lost
of days spent just passing the time
when that is all that can be said

trying
with wounded conversation to attract
in a room that grows smaller with the ego
the sweat on the brow a beacon to avoid
and the ships steer wide, ignoring the siren's call as if it were
no more than the words of a priest, or a salesman

the sparrow sings the same song every spring
yet each year there are new matings new pairings
do they forget? or can there be a novelty in repetition?
on the thousandth time a same note sounds different
or perhaps the sound wears away the mind and the memory

or perhaps they realize that all the newness has gone out of the
world
leaving a wake of historians and critics

leaving me to rearrange the playgrounds of past genius
and sip at a half-warm drink
as if I were composing

Pontifications on an Occupationally Deficient Face

If I had a rugged face
chiseled, angular, with a grin
I could shave on TV commercials
and smile and stroke my jutting chin.

If I had a lying face
smarmy, smirking but sweet as molasses
I could be a politician
and delude the monstrous angered masses.

If I had a crying face
martyred, weeping, soothing as honey
I could be a religious leader
and suck dependent drones for money.

If I had a plastic face
vacant, vapid, devoid of life
I could be a broadcast journalist
reporting blandly on world strife.

But I have none of the faces named
I'll have to stay up day and night
No fat paycheck in my mailbox!
I'll join the twisted crowd and write.

Desperation

Last night
hunched over,
between two recently washed cars
parked without regard for the painted spaces,
the escapist churning alcohol
expelled everything she had inside to the blacktop,
while she cried, begging it to stop.
This morning
I noticed a crow
gorging on misfortune.
When I met his poor wretched eyes,
he stopped. As he fled, to escape my glance,
embarrassed,
I passed.
He circled back around.
Out loud, I whispered, "Dear God."

The Advent of Winter

Behind my unstained glass window, I watched while the last leaf let go,
Losing its grasp upon the branch,
And fell from the grace of autumn.
From the tree's spire, it spiraled downward
Inevitably landing soundlessly where its kindred spirits
Congregated in a pile,
Already dead and prepared for the fire.
I wished I could have caught it in the air between above and below,
Before it knew the corruption of the ground or had lost its status above,
And reconciled its situation on the branch
To resurrect the fall.
Instead, without a prayer
I waited,
Allowing fate to have her way
And for winter to anoint the tree
and me.

Celia

She seems so much older than me.
I never see her laugh or play.
I think she belongs to the mean bus driver,
because she sits in the front seat
alone, and no one else is allowed
to sit there. Or wants to.
I watch her sometimes.
She has the hugest blue, blue eyes
and black-blue bags that pull
down her lower lids.
But she doesn't seem to have any feelings.
She isn't sad or happy,
just older. And tireder. And dirty.
I think she lives in a trailer park somewhere.
They seem like tired and dirty places.
I don't know
because she always gets on the bus before me.
When it gets warm
she wears short-sleeve shirts,
and I see she has black and blue bags on her arms, too.
In my imagination I call her Celia.
She deserves a pretty name like that.
One day I dropped my books
getting off the bus.
She helped me pick them up.
I looked up to say "Thank you,"
and her baggy blue eyes
suddenly screamed at mine.
For help.
She looked little again.
I was too scared to speak.
The bus driver scowled at me,
so I backed off the bus and ran home.
I never looked at Celia again,
and I felt older like her.

Response

Listen, child,
there are people who would hurt you,
hang names on you you haven't chosen.
Be careful, child,
some people tear flies' wings
and some would tear bits of your heart more easily
unaware that those bits won't patch up their own.
And child, you know
you can't wrap your heart up tight
in a bright plastic bow.
Child, you know what to do:
Stand there tall with you delicious smile
and look 'em straight in the eye.
I know you, child.
You're a sweeter surprise
than a pink rose in the snow.
Child, you know it too.
You could never hide your honey heart
but choose well who you want to share it with.
Go ahead, child.
Run your fingers along the smooth black ink
of my words sitting here
silent 'til you speak them to yourself.
And never, child, never
forget your voice has rhythm and power;
don't let your words be as passive as print.
So, sweet child, listen:
Your voice is a river, you have streams
which carry love always, and silence 'specially.
Child,
you hold up silence
and leave us, lead us to ourselves.

Bas

Bas

is the only word I need know in India.

Bas, my father taught me,
and at first he had to say it for me
as I stared through the people,
people dressed in silks or rags
and dressed in dirt, all of them.

I stared through the poverty and roses,
through the Gate of India and the British buildings,
through to the angry blue-gray Arabian sea
where no one has the leisure to swim.

Bas means "go away,"

go away to the four-year-old girl
—whom I have avoided so long—
dressed in rags so bright,
begging face beautiful under the dust,
standing in the train station,
foreign-built and set like a bon-bon
to be dirtied and destroyed
by this army of Indians who
must have seemed like ants to me.

After a month of focusing
on the dusty roads, mat-furred animals or
poorly printed slogans on dying diesel trucks,
now I say *bas* for myself
as she pulls on my modest dress
in this station with the shit-covered floor
on which thousands sleep nightly and now.
I say *bas* and hold out my empty hands
to prove they are not rich as she imagines.
I say *bas* until one person in the group
speaks up to offer a banana
(so small and green and softly sweet)
and she attacks again with more urgency, unsatisfied,
knowing we possess Indian coins.
"*Pice, pice!*" (like pies, both words
refer to luxuries which I cannot

Bas continued

admit I understand here).

"*Pice!*" she begs—one pice equalling
one twelfth of a penny.

Pice she follows me for, as we
step over people with wasted bodies
in torn gray material which was never new.
Pice as we follow the men in ragged red turbans,
running to keep track of our heavy bags
until the bags are safe and our big
first class dirty baby blue seats are moving
back to Bombay, back to more coolies,
more demanding beggars, impatient
and poor airport customs officials and
finally

bas to India as we sit down
in air-conditioned comfort
in business class to our complimentary
champagne and orange juice and
our crisply clean bilingual stewardesses.

Bas to that unreal, real world

Bas to the poverty of too much life

Bas to the strange airplane silence
in which we may sit and reflect
upon the value of our experience.



Prose



UNDERPANTS

It was raining outside and I felt like I was wearing someone else's underpants when I woke up that morning. Nearly every goddamn day of my existence I feel like I'm wearing a garment that doesn't belong to me. On good days it's someone else's socks. On bad days its underpants.

I wish on those days I could tell whose underpants I was wearing. They didn't even seem like men's underpants. They were these skimpy blue silky kind of underpants. Actually, they wouldn't have felt so bad if they weren't so tight. But I wore them anyway, because it was all I could find.

I put on my ill-fitting underpants and then I put on the rest of my clothing and then I went outside. Even though it was raining, I didn't have my umbrella. It's not that I didn't have an umbrella, because I did. I had a little game I played on rainy days. I walked around town and pretended I was actually going someplace, and I'd share umbrellas with whoever offered. On good days, I'd strike up conversations with people who offered. It was fun to learn about people that way. On bad days, especially days when my underpants didn't fit, no one offered me their umbrella.

So I walked around a while and I watched kids walk to school in their yellow slickers. Birds played in puddles and made twittering noises. Bloated earthworms squished beneath my feet. I started feeling sort of sorry for the earthworms, as I was wont to do on rainy days.

Eventually, a middle-aged sad-looking man let me share his umbrella. There were two classes of people who shared umbrellas, as I had found during my first couple of months of playing this game. Some people did it to be nice, and others did it to be polite. You may think there's not much difference, but you're wrong. Polite people do it because they feel obligated to when they see this melancholy fellow walking alone in the rain without an umbrella. These types usually aren't very interesting.

This guy was a polite guy. He was just going to work like everyone else at that time of morning. We talked a bit, but he wasn't too excited about much of anything. Eventually he just went into his office, which was a one-story, drab sort of building. It figured, considering he was drab and one-story himself. I think people tend to be like buildings. One-story people — well, you know what I'm talking about. You just walk in and there's nowhere to go. The worst people are doctor's waiting rooms, but there's no doctor to wait for, just a lot of well-thumbed trashy magazines and a sense of apprehension.

This went on for a while. I thought about how most people I met were one-story. They didn't have gleams in their eyes that hinted at a lust for life. A lot of them also reminded me of what happened to me when I was a kid. There was this brand of soap that was very popular, which had a little plastic toy in the center of it. The incentive was for kids to scrub and scrub so they would get the little toy.

I scrubbed and scrubbed, but when I got to the center there was nothing. I cried and cried. A lot of people are like that. They don't have toys in the center, either. But I don't cry for them.

I stepped into a diner for lunch. I munched on a grilled cheese sandwich and drank some lemonade and thought about the future, about where I'd go and what I'd do. When I was done, I paid, tipped the waitress and left.

Only about a million raindrops after leaving the diner, I found an umbrella-sharer. Instantly, I was taken in by her. She had a gleam in her eye, a gleam stronger than any I'd ever seen, and she was wearing a yellow slicker just like the kids I had seen. In one arm she was carrying a bag of groceries.

"Hi," she said. Her voice was like Kool-Aid being poured, like a package of graham crackers being opened for snacktime in a kindergarten classroom. I wondered who had the warm apple juice.

"Hi. What's in the bag?"

"Chocolate milk and Meow Mix."

"Interesting combination. I like chocolate milk, but I've never had..."

"No, the Meow Mix is for my cat, Lennon." She laughed, and the laugh was a rockslide, but a mischievous confectioner replaced all the rocks with rock candy.

"Lenin the Communist?"

"No, Lennon the Beatle."

"Oh."

We walked in silence for a long time. Every now and then I stole a glimpse of her. She had long brown hair and these beautiful features, and sometimes she would smile at nothing at all.

She stopped abruptly underneath an awning and collapsed her umbrella. "Well, this is my apartment," she said, and I felt sad that she'd be leaving me. "Do you want to come in for some chocolate milk?"

A shudder of ecstasy went through my body. My heart oscillated like a zither. I loved chocolate milk.

"Sure."

We walked up three flights of creaky stairs and into her apartment. It smelled musty and lived-in. A cat, presumably the aforementioned Lenin (or was it Lennon?), sat on top of a stack of records which, being old, lent a lot of aroma to the room. Anyone who has spent too much time in tiny used record stores knows what I mean. Books were sitting all over the place. Wine bottles held wildflowers in their drunken lackadaisical grasps. A beanbag chair sat near a vintage record player.

Shooing the cat off of the pile of records, she put on some jazz. "Have a seat," she said sweetly, removing her slicker.

"Do you have a bathroom?" I asked. "All this rain makes me think about bathrooms."

"Yeah, it's down that hallway," she said, gesturing appropriately.

I walked into the bathroom, turned on the light, and my eyes laid rest upon a laundry basket.

Full of men's underpants.

My heart sunk and splashed in my galoshes. I was too heartbroken to even urinate. I walked out and grabbed my coat and said, "Look, I better go..."

"So soon?" she asked, seeming genuinely hurt. The lighthouse keeper in her eyes quit for the day.

"Yeah," I said. "Lotta work, you know how it can be..." I turned to open the door.

"Wait," she said, touching my arm. My skin would have reciprocated, had it hands to speak of. "Tell me the truth. You saw the underwear."

I lowered my head in shame. "Yes."

"You've got to believe me when I tell you that it's *my* underwear." She sighed. "It's the weirdest thing," she continued, "but some days, it's all that's in my drawer. It's too big, and..."

I couldn't believe it.

"What size?" I asked. I could feel my heart working its way back up my pants leg, and my soul was leaping over a lake like the General Lee.

"They're all size 34."

"What color underwear do you usually wear?"

"Blue."

"I know just what you mean," I said. She didn't understand, but I hugged her, held her in my arms, and wept.

She disentangled herself from my embrace and looked in my pants. "Jesus Christ!" she exclaimed, and the lighthouse operator in her eyes realized he had forgotten his coat. She hugged me even tighter, and we both said:

"You are a skyscraper, and I want to ride every elevator."

Except she said "escalator." But it's the same thing, really.

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

Mutual masochism can be a strong force in friendship. Masochism or fearlessness. I think it was fearlessness on Protus' part, but masochism on mine exactly because I wasn't fearless. Looked at another way, Protus was a physical masochist while I was a mental one by hanging around him. He really liked pain. The only time I ever saw him cry was the time he knelt on his hamster and subsequently broke its neck while looking for it under his bed. That's how I knew he was just a masochist. Even back then I used to think that Protus could die tomorrow and be the luckiest person I ever met. Hector, on the other hand, had the intelligence to recognize and appreciate danger. I don't know why he went along with our pranks. I think mostly so he could see Protus do the crazy things that he thought up.

It was before the days of alcohol and drugs; our parents wouldn't have stood for that. Instead, the activities revolved around more natural things like life and death, or at least luck and injury. I rarely thought about it in those terms. It was usually fun, at least afterwards, especially when we would sit and make up stories about what we had all just been through. It was a deliberate exploitation of youthful invincibility that we knew to be fictitious, but that we felt to be real. It seems almost delusory now, perhaps because I prefer to remember it that way. But it was real then. Steel, blood, stars, and stupid loyalty were all real back then.

The trees grow straight, white, and tall supporting a canopy a mile above our heads that prevents any undergrowth near our feet. In the darkness the white trunks glow as poplar leaf scampers disperse at irregular intervals on both sides. The earlier day's activities of B.B. gun wars and hilltop wrestling leave a bruised yet strangely relaxed limpness to our half-jog strides. The need for talk dissolved hours ago into the reassuring camaraderie of shared experience. I look to the side at a sweaty sheen of exuberance that this crew-cut headed, tribal leader named Protus embodies. Leadership without double entendres or promises: the commander of bestial instincts, crudely inspiring, yet disturbing to me for reasons that I dismiss as a distaste for destruction rather than as jealousy.

With unlit cigars in hand we burst into a long scar in the forest stitched together by steel beams and wooden railroad ties. Panting hard we each claim a place inside the tracks as our butts sink into gravel and our backs rest against steel.

"Who's got the lighter?" asks Protus as he rips off the plastic wrapper.

With the lighter already concealed in my palm, I watch as Hector slaps every pocket in his camouflage pants and army green jacket. As he grunts and strains to stand up and reach his seat pockets, I light my cigar and hand the lighter

to Protus.

"How long before the train?" I ask Protus.

Looking at his diving watch he responds, "Judging from the stars I'd say about twenty more minutes."

Scooting deeper into the gravel we all look up at the stars made clearer by the near freezing temperature and the absence of cigar smoke when the breeze blows right. There is a half-conscious awareness among the three of us that this cliched rebellious activity is important simply because it is so cliched that nobody ever does it. While every inch of this activity is part of adolescent lore, we are the only ones we know making it our own.

As we lay in wait, my mind wanders to thoughts from earlier in the week about the Mozarts, Phidiases, and Shakespeares of the world that exhibit and develop genius at an age younger than my own. I try to remember the last thing that I "created" when I wasn't under compulsion and settle upon a clay whale that I made and then blew up with M-80's a few weeks before. The ridiculousness of the "you can do anything you set your mind to" hypothesis rears its head, and I feel weak and physically fragile lying on these tracks that pass through thousands of towns with thousands of people who have read thousands of books and probably remember them, too. My greatest fault is that I don't take pride in mediocrity. I only pretend to be an underachiever in order to avoid the embarrassment of mediocrity. Perhaps my greatest connection to Protus and Hector is that they attack everything that I hold sacred. Therefore, ninety-nine percent of the time that we are together we pretend not to care about anything and look for slip-ups from the other two. It is actually much more friendly than it sounds. After all, we're bound together by feigned irreverence, and we believe that it's good training for life.

With cigars burning low I begin to hear a faint rumble and then the unmistakable jiggling of my head against the track. The three of us are brought back from our own inane thoughts to a much more satisfying companionship in the trials of life. Hector attempts a look of bored disinterest while Protus' eyes glow with the prospects of the upcoming excitement. We are all careful not to move with the exception of lifting our heads an inch above the vibrating track. Strength surges though my body and a sick feeling rumbles in my bowels as the game begins.

As the train approaches, a more even thumping sound emerges from the initial low moan. I glance over at Protus' prostrate body and begin to imagine what it would look like after it had been run over by a train. I imagine limbs separated and lying on the side of the tracks and an unrecognizable mush of flesh and blood mixed with gravel. The vision seems almost sacrificial. I can't think of any other way that Protus would rather die, and I think that right now he would like to die with just Hector and me here to see it since we are the ones that would give the best retelling later. We would be sitting around ten years from now—

I with my wife and Hector with a good stiff drink—and we would talk about that fateful night on the tracks. We'd easily joke and relate the way Protus looked at the train when it was about a hundred yards away from him, looked up at the two of us motioning him to get up, how he'd smiled, extinguished his cigar in his hand as he had often done in the past, and then vanished under screeching, braking wheels.

As the thumping grows louder a fear grows within my heart, but not for my own safety. I know that I have no pride and will soon step aside, way aside, from the train. My fear is for Protus. I know how he thinks. I know how tempting it all is. I begin to wonder what I will do after the train passes with Protus underneath. Will I try to piece him back together, or run? I think that he would want Hector and me to reach into his chest cavity and withdraw his sporadically beating heart and suck out the blood contained within it. While I don't necessarily feel that Protus' wish would be naturally inappropriate, I worry about possible diseases his blood might carry. I have little question that his immoderate behavior around us carries over into many more things I don't know about. That's part of his appeal. Yet, what happens when the same bodily fluid that used to be sprinkled on fields for fertility and chaliced in an earthen cup, becomes a contagion? And that's only part of it. Who ever looks at death in a positive way nowadays? This death wouldn't be a sacrifice, it would be a suicide. It would be seen as an act of desperation rather than experimentation. The motives would be all wrong, and everyone would say what a nice, normal boy he was; and we are. I realize in a frightening bout of self-realization that maybe I want to see what would happen, know what I would do, and see how I would interpret it. We need to feel and taste blood. Not just any blood, but fresh, selfless, renewing blood. Maybe not Protus', but he feels it just the same and knows that he actually has the power to grant Hector and myself the one thing we can never have: guiltless blood. Besides, Protus knows that his pranks have gravitated toward death all along. He has and always will be a death force. That's also part of his appeal. While the rest of us are scared of it, Protus keeps heading for it. Not for the sake of knowledge, but because he's so inherently and essentially physical that death is the only fully traumatic experience left after being born.

About a quarter-mile down the tracks we see the right side of the track brighten and then the cyclops light slink around the corner and look right at us. I slowly get my legs up under me while I remain in a crouched position so as not to attract the conductors attention early enough for him to stop and destroy Protus' fun. I begin to feel the thumping through my entire body as Hector's clothes gradually shift from a grayish color to an army green. I leap free, Hector tugs at an animal paralyzed by light, and my fetal position shelters me from screeches, sparks, and a winter's evening chill.

Years later, I still think it all has to do with fear. We're born with our parents feeling it, we live our lives inhibited by it, and the normal ones among us die praying against it. There is something heroic about those born with fear deficiencies. Some lesson that they could teach us if we could just figure out what it is. I can't make up my mind whether Protus was purely destructive or whether I'm still jealous. I just know that I am and always have been the only one of the two of us contemplating it.

Art

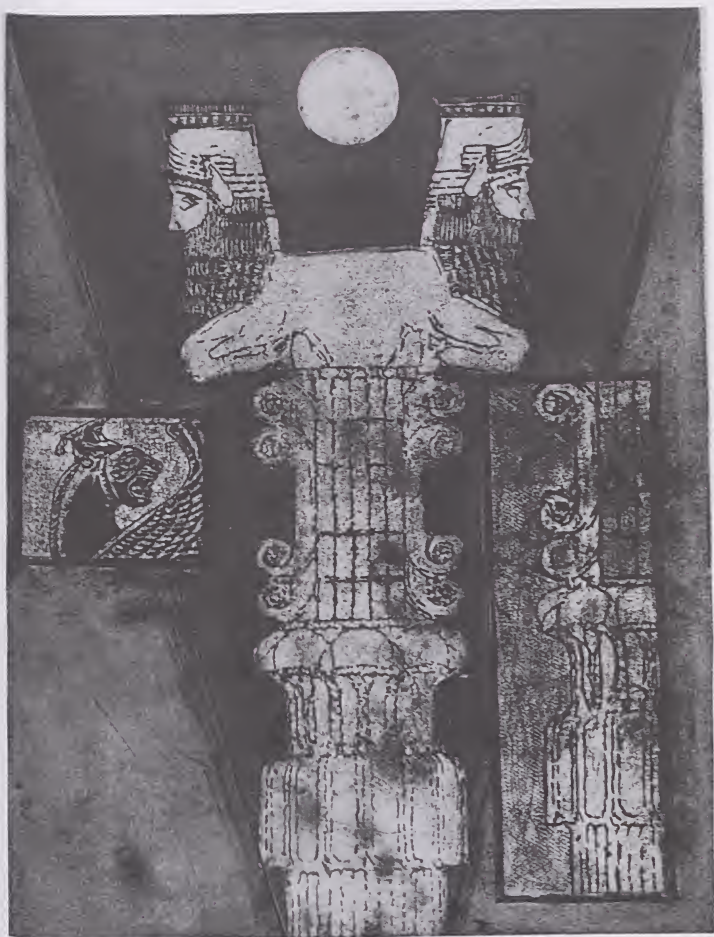




A Common Theme Circling

Sarah Kuseske





"Persepolis"

Hessam Alimohammadi



Photography





Leigh Ann Ruggles



Stowe Blankenship



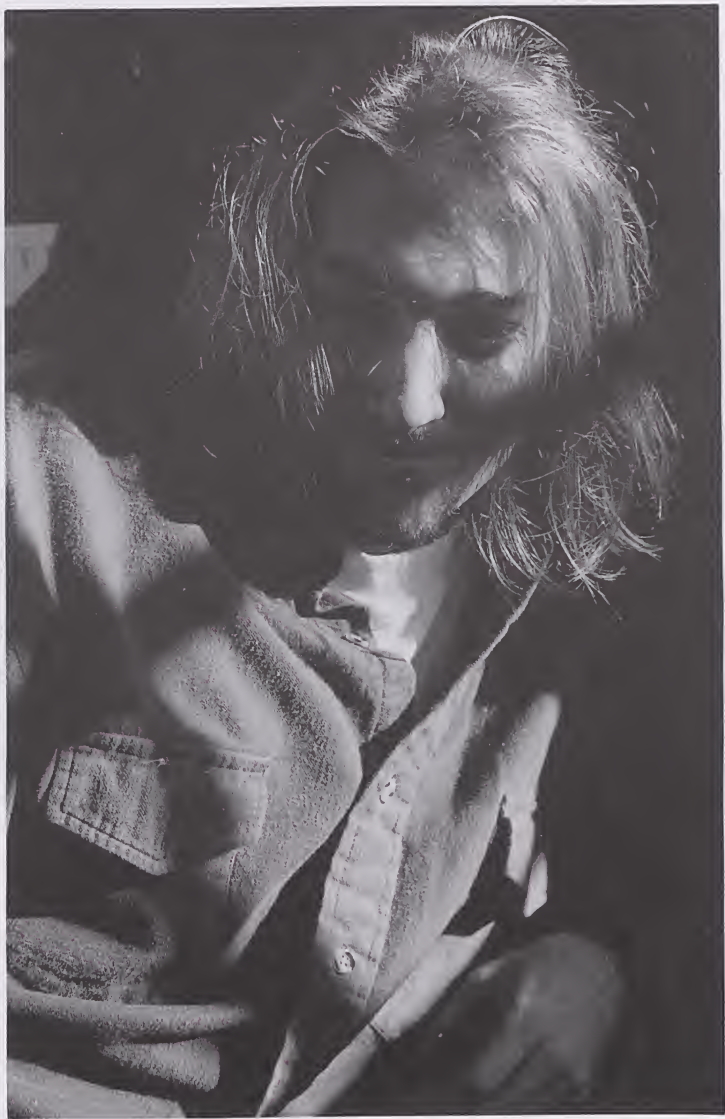
Holly Tackett



Holly Tackett



Laura Keeney



Laura Keeney



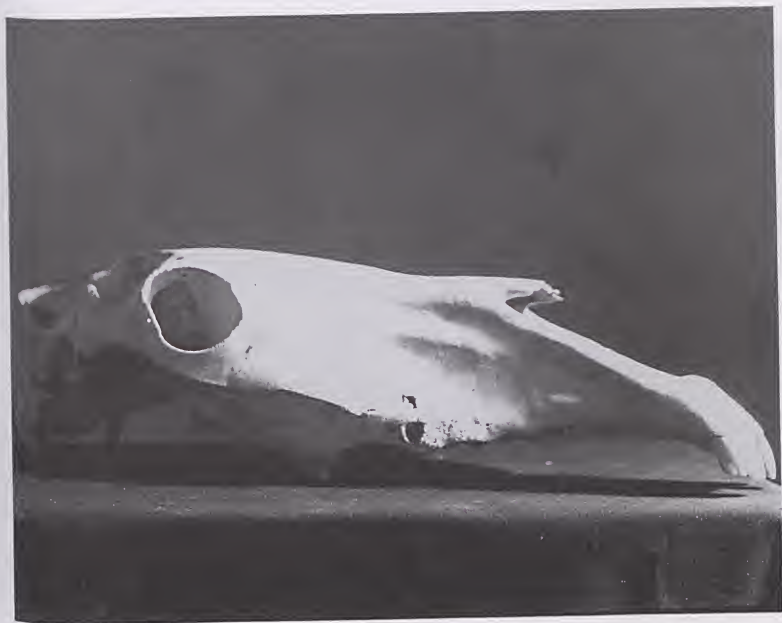
Mexican Indians, Tiajuana Mexico

Allen Strum



Mormon Temple, San Diego CA

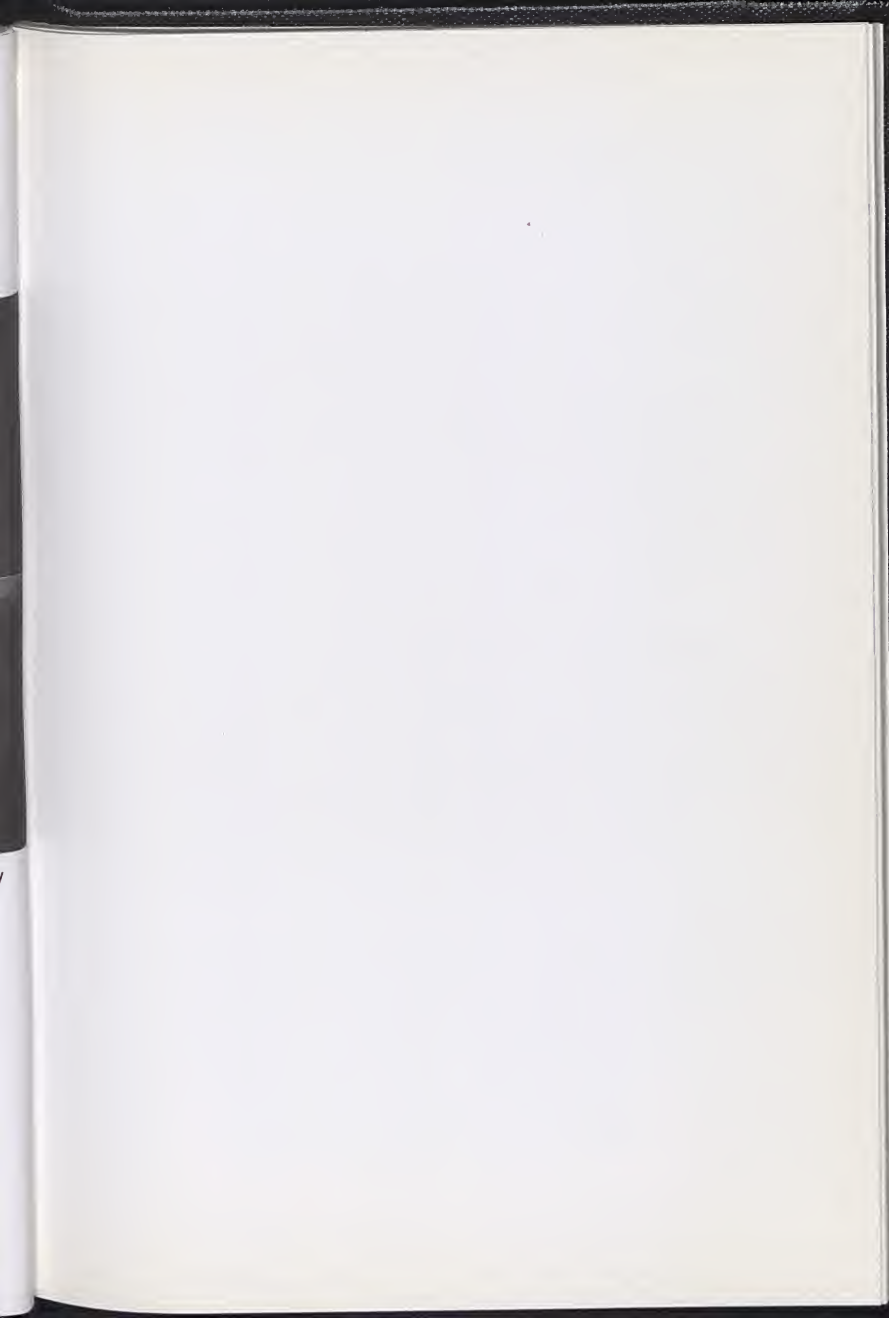
Allen Strum



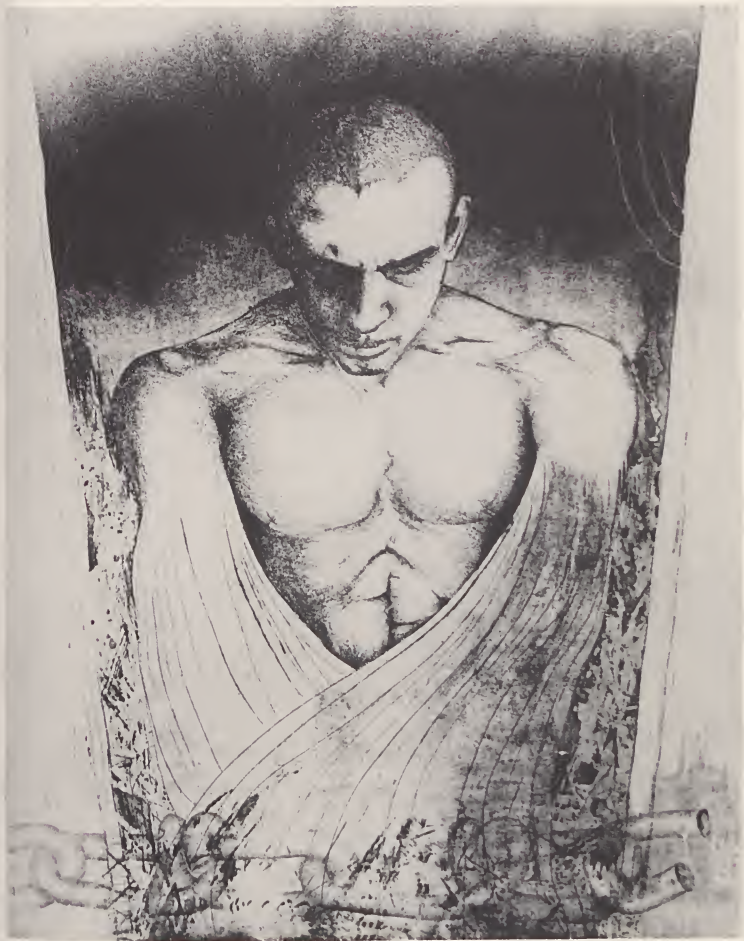
Traci Hartman



Laura Keeney

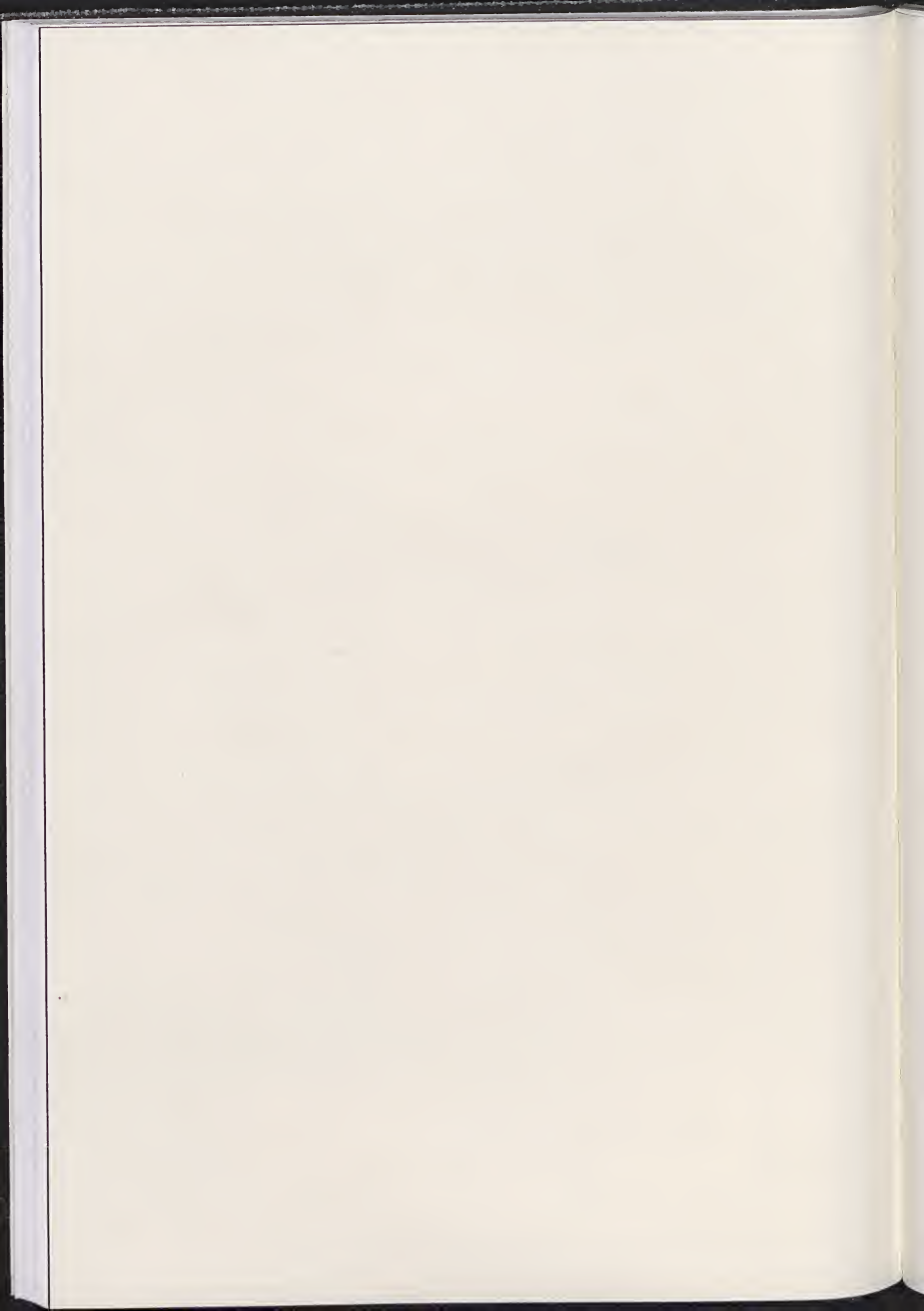






The Student

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. SPRING 1994



The Student

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.
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The Student

Spring 1994

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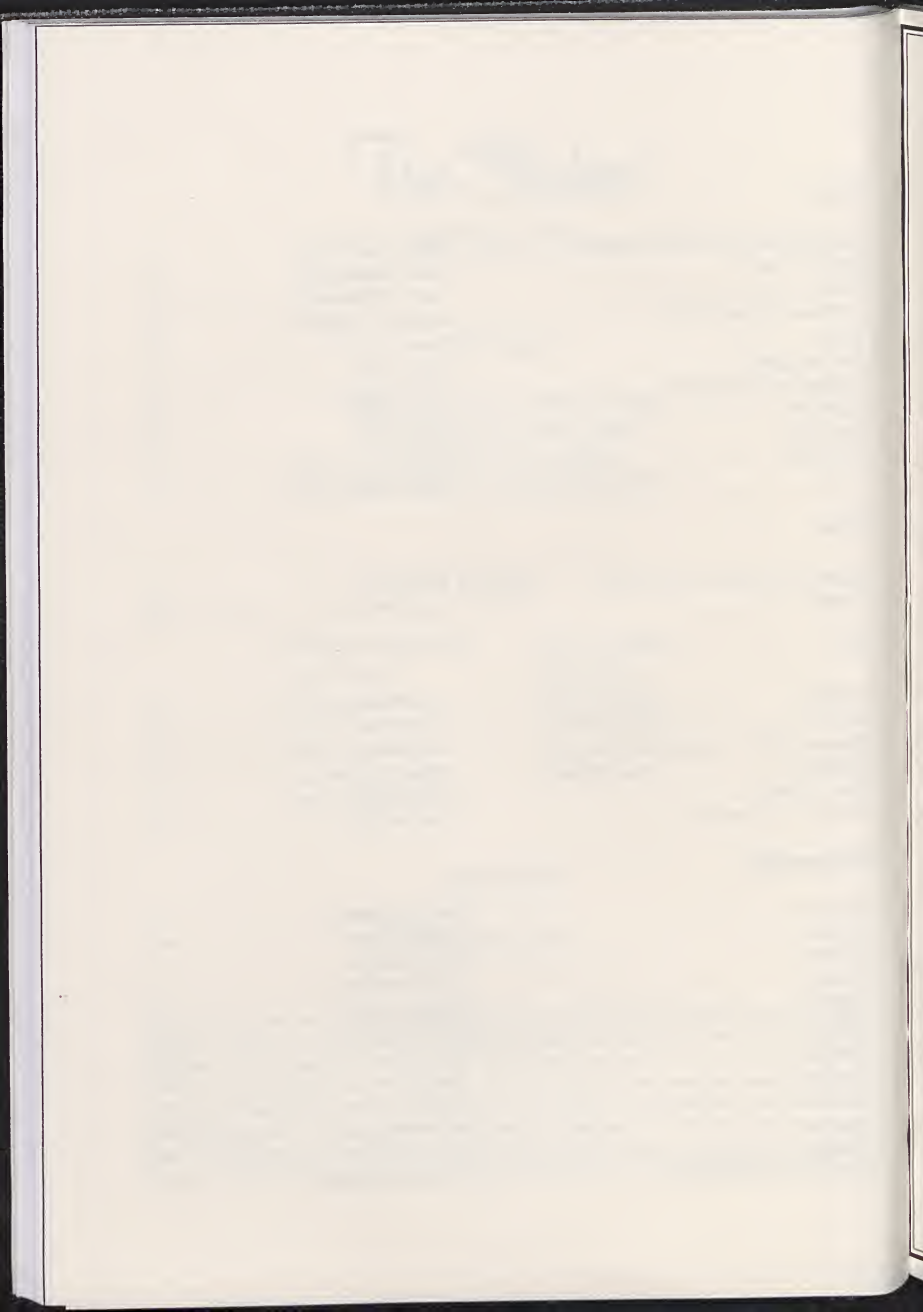
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Poetry



Depression Glass and Tomatoes

Illuminated, the sign read
"Depression Glass and Tomatoes."
An older couple, retired,
sells the fruits of their labor,
shiny red tomatoes
and glass in shades of green.

They sit each day and display
their best products,
reasonably priced,
looking forward to selling enough
to afford their own dreams,
happy
as another bowl,
another fleshy fruit, is
sold.

Fresh Cookies

Opening the oven door
propelled chocolate chip cookie smells
into the kitchen
and I couldn't wait
for the cookies to cool
before I started my gorging.
Feasting. Fasting.
A one letter difference
in opposite words.
Contradictory.
Not so.
Not so, I say.
The toilet bowl shows
my handiwork,
my finger's job.
I owed it to myself.

Storm

Glaring white, ice layered thick,
driveway slicker than a wet tile floor.
How do the ice skaters manage?
They have a thin blade;
everyone else has traction.
Still, they are more graceful
and more often on their feet.

I hold my balance
but Nana slips,
an aging woman
in a freak belly dance,
an ice skater
too long off the ice.

A More Modern Faith

Try to
Cup a beam of sunlight in your hand
How savage each peculiar ray extends
You'll never hold its glow
The foolish never seem to know
But stand in line with buckets
Desperate to contain the ever-light
Before the night
Has chance to eclipse our warmest touch

These people
Hold religion closest to their heart
In paper
The ink smears lines across their skin
And dries in unmentionable patterns
Of hope
Some people see god in these patterns
Good job
Here's a fish

I have tried to hold the sun
It falls before me naked and alive
Clutches mother earth
Like son to breast
While elongating my darkest form
Have faith
You have passed the test
Not I
I still can't feel that
Which I can not hold

rape

The sun was setting over the naked hills last evening
the grotesque humps of the ridges tearing into the sky
with gnarled and twisted winter branches groping for the sun
and my heart wept a soft yellow, orange thing, burning cooler

The tree leaves were gone, nothing to hold the embrace
of the sun, nothing to invite the lingerance of the rays falling
Instead; broken gaps of blackness protruded from cold shadows
and my heart was tearing across red, red land, wimpering quiet

A vapor trail scarred the sky an angry purple, star plane
following the sun to happier lands; cut dripped puffs of red,
gold, purple, orange against final blues. The fight was over
and my heart, bruised, broken and battered held the blackness tight

The Accident

How very odd it was,
to spin so freely on the ice
in a powder blue Plymouth.
I could not have prepared myself.

At first my mother's hand
flew out
like a dove on a string
and struck my ribcage with a thump.
Then I remember the panic,
and how I grappled with
that damn strip of fake leather
next to me
on the door.
We spun for so long, though,
that I grew tired,
and gave up.

What a spin it was.
We could have been
waiting
for a bus,
for concert tickets,
or for water to boil.

The last thing I remember
was turning and seeing my brother,
and the suffocated scream
forcing his mouth
into that very circle
which dots the question mark.

Is everyone okay?

Caffeinated Babysitter

In a wonderful and terrible instant,
the teacup transforms me
to one transcendent and shackled.
Birds and martians,
curious and strange creatures,
dancing in my veins.
Beaks, antennae, and elbows
poke out all over my skin.
I might be a loaded can of pop,
shaken by a huge three-year old,
with an enormous voice and sticky hands.
I am charged with a terrible feeling
he might tear me open
and spray me into the wind.

I am charged with a terrible feeling
that if I drink
one more cup-
one more sip-
one more drop-
I'll sprint out
through the swinging screen door,
screaming.

Stillbirth

Outside,
the moon
reflects
eerie light.
On the glowing grayness
of snow
shadows of tree limbs,
phantoms of appendages,
hush me,
silent, swaying shadows
of my past.

The light
in here
is thick
and orange.
I need
something
warm
inside me.
Oatmeal, coffee, tea.

I am an angel,
or at least,
part of me died.
I am a mother
ascending
steps
with warm milk
but the stairs don't creak
beneath me.

Chaos and solemnity
swallow me
like
a patchwork quilt
made
with veiny hands.

Heat flies
off my body
into space.

Nothing is warm.

Drought

Wordsworth. He made a place famous. Nobody visits the lakes without knowing that Wordsworth was here. You can't. He's everywhere. Every bookstore. Every postcard shop. I went there expecting blank verse to lunge out at me, to grab me and force the words out — down my arm, through my hand, into my pen and onto anything that was at hand. I saw a lot of sheep. No verse. I saw a whole lot of sheep. They were all spray-painted. Some blue and some pink. Boys and girls? Wordsworth never once mentioned painted sheep. I haven't read everything I've written, but I'd say I have a fair to good working knowledge. And he never mentioned painted sheep. But I saw them everywhere. Every single valley was populated by painted sheep. Poetry doesn't come out of the lakes anymore. The lakes made Wordsworth. I'm pretty sure that if he had grown up in Cleveland he never would have made it to Poet Laureate. But who have the lakes made since? Poetry doesn't come out of the lakes anymore. There's no room for it. There are too many painted sheep taking up the space that the words used to occupy.

The Eave

The phone rang at a time
When phones never ring
You were already marble
The blood trapped in its flow
Blue streams frozen still
Under your skin
A silent panic
Followed us
To your side

You were dying
Dangled above death
With needles and tubes
Like a statue hung
From hoists over a pedestal
You slept all day

Unaware
That we crouched
By your bed
Waiting

Until you raised your head
Cast your eyes
On us all
And fell
Back to the pillow

I heard
My grandmother sobbing
As your last breath
Wallowed across the room
Like an old acrobat
Out on the eave
Tumbling one last time

Just to prove he can.

Letter

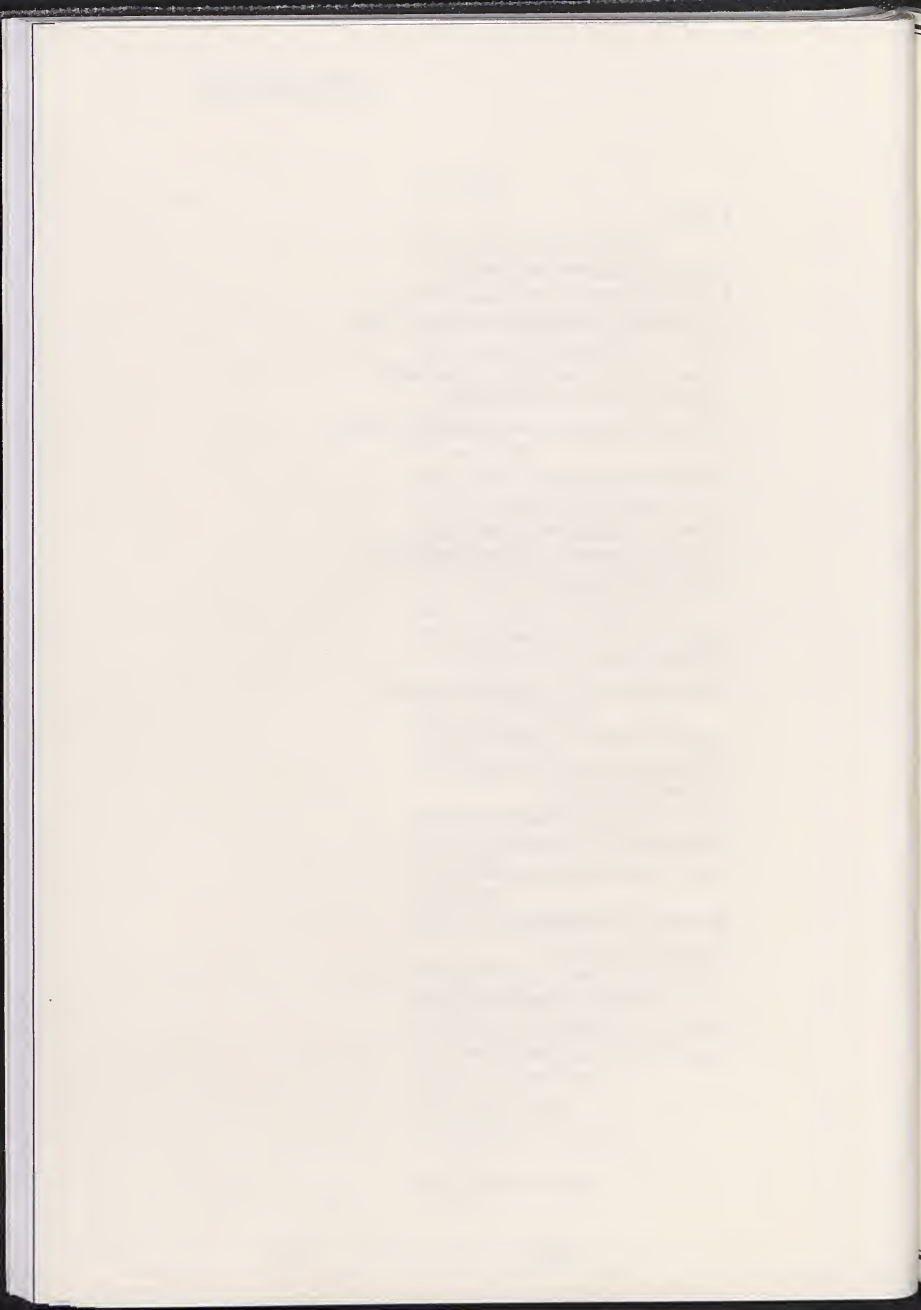
There is a letter on my desk.
I wrote it yesterday, too many times,
And now the words are empty as a full
Motel at midnight. Like the night
I spent, there was music on the metro
And you danced while I cried.
But I will not say what you already know.

It doesn't matter now, it's all past.
But it is still in my voice
When I'm alone. Isn't that your
Favorite pose, the one you left me in?
I don't feel like art.

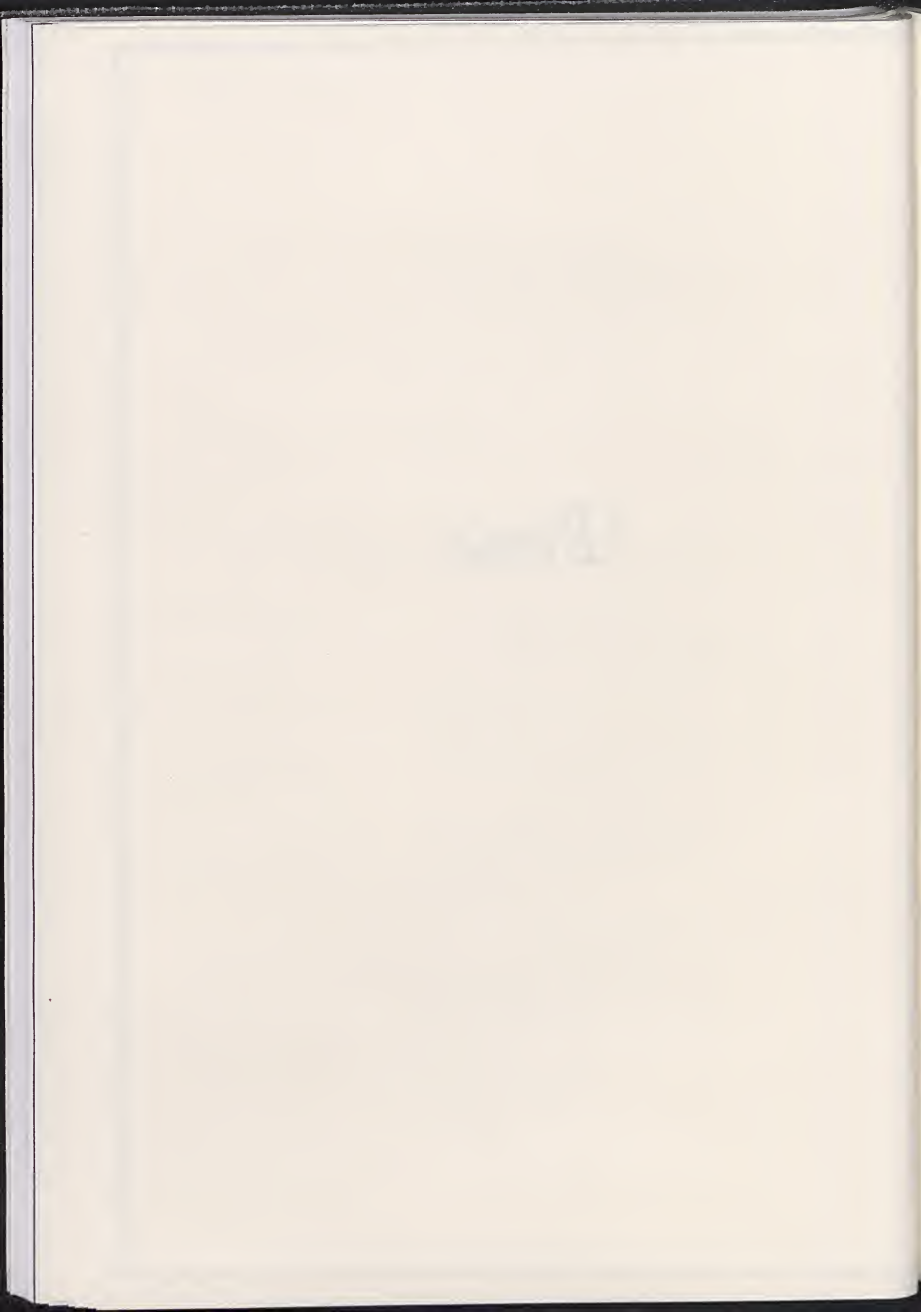
Am I hung on your wall, though?
With the others who are ticks
In your time. How long did it take?

And I've written another letter
To apologize for the blame
You've said is mine,
But I'm tired of mining my own
Faults while you walk away.
I don't want to talk about it.

So maybe this will be
The last letter I try,
And maybe there will be
An answer, and maybe tomorrow
None of it will mean
Anything anymore anyway.



Prose



THREE YEARS SPENT IN FEBRUARY

There is a way out, through there, up there, but I'm fine here for now. I have eight pencils, no paper, but there are walls enough in here to write on. Or to draw on. Circles I like, but I can't find a stopping point. I went through my first three pencils that way. Drawing and sharpening, drawing and sharpening, and all I had was OOO. OOO — I frighten myself when I read it. Have they come back? I tried to look around, but my head doesn't work that way. OOO — I read it again, and I heard them again. I spent a long time scared, but I don't know how long. I bite my fingernails, so I don't know how much they've grown. My hair is long now. I don't know how long it was before I used my three pencils, though, so it doesn't prove a very reliable chronometer. It's brown, at least what I can see of it, the rest may be grey now, or blonde maybe. Or red. Red is nice. I read it again — OOO — and when I calmed down, I read it again, and again, until I heard myself. They weren't back, they couldn't be back because I made the noise — OOO. OOO — I made the noise, and I wasn't scared, because they weren't back because I made the noise — OOO. It came out of my mouth. I made the noise. Unless they lived in my mouth. Could they do that? They never did before, but they never came before. Maybe they were in my mouth. Maybe they made the noise. I tried to stab them with the fourth pencil, but I missed. The point went through my cheek, but the pencil still wrote. Maybe they went down into my stomach, but I don't think so. I think I would have felt that, and I think I would have digested them, but I don't have to shit. If I have to shit maybe I'll shit them out, but I don't have to shit. If I digested them they would be dead. I think they're dead — OOO. They must not be dead because when I read it, I still hear them. I ran my tongue around my mouth. I didn't feel them, but maybe they went back down into my stomach. Maybe I can't digest them like my fingernails. Or maybe they jumped through the hole in my cheek. I read it again really fast — OOO — but the sound still came out of my mouth. Maybe I make the sound, but maybe, maybe they jumped in again really quick. I tried drawing lines, but I could never get to the end. My pencil always ran out. Four lines. I used half of the pencils up on lines. Four pencils left. Sharpen, draw, sharpen, draw. Drawing and sharpening until I scraped my fingers on the wall. I tried to read the lines, but I didn't know what they said. I think they may have been magic, though, because when I read them they didn't come back to frighten me. I think they are gone now, or at least I think they don't live in my mouth. The hole in my cheek is gone, and I always keep my mouth shut, so I don't think they can get in. Maybe they never left my mouth, though. But I don't think so. I think they're gone. I can't test it, though, because I can't read the circles anymore. The circles were at the start of the lines. Now I'm at the end of the lines. But I can't go back. If I can't read the circles, I can't find

out if they are still there. Maybe they are still in my mouth, but are just keeping quiet. But I can't read the circles and I can't read the lines. With three pencils I made a fire to scare them away if they were still there. I don't know if they are scared of fire. They were never scared of fire before, but they were never here before. But they must be scared of fire, unless they're not. But I am. I ran away. I dropped my last pencil. Now I don't know which way is out.

CEPHIE

They can be damn stupid, the lot of them (except Jeff, sometimes) — even though there's only two of them, brothers. And ugly — both, sometimes. A sloppy, grinnin'-ugly herd of two.

At nights, some nights, I come out here to the porch, on the peeling green paint of the porch swing, and grub in the nearblack with this pen and a little paper. The only light out here is bluish-white, and flyspeckled with blood. Fly's blood, or flies' blood: the alien-blue zapper light draws them in by the swarms, and warms them in its wirecage arms, which jut out from either side of the bulb and anchor the contraption to the porch roof. Draws them in, and warms them until they freeze. A mother, to them.

The light is good, though, because it tacks the dark black from my feet, like little silver thumbtacks on a black curtain. It makes a dim greyish square of the porch, and nothing else of the whole soft jeering black world. From the flydeadly bulb over the slate steps, down to that hole in the lattice-work on the porch that Noah will dumbly, sweetly fix soon — the world away from this porch drops off, like an edge on the globe. It makes me think of Columbus and his new world — him, fucking Queen Isabella (with his hand cool on her thigh under all that ermine and velvet, I'll bet) to go there. Hah. I'm slipping my arms over my knees and hugging their bare skin to my chest, chin tucked. Why *go there* when you can create somewhere for yourself?

They met me while I was walking on Morris Avenue, alone with a red paisley kerchief knotted in a bulge around my wrist. I'd even thought, before, of tying my bag to a pole, or a tree branch and slinging it over a shoulder: I like to look the part. I was wearing my black dress, tucked in at the waist and flaring, sharp and flounced, hem at midthigh. I remember that: I still have it, and wear it a little. It's not quite the part, but it served a purpose. And a jangly Mickey Mouse watch, black plastic band with yellow, white and red cartoons all over its face. Noah likes that watch so much I can never take it off, "never," he pleads now, grappling and grabbing. So I remember that, too. I had a piece of ribbon, narrow and dark blue, tied around my throat. The ends of it trailed down my back and into my hair — a thin bit of silk tagging my back, bruising it. *Who are you, Cephie*, I think sometimes, still. And it's those ribbons, touching my back and sliding all over the skin, hidden under a weight of dark hair. It's me.

No shoes. — Noah remembers *that* the most, the best: he's told me over and over, earnestly and loudly, since then. He thought it in the driver's seat, said it, and then slid the truck to the side of the road. Jeff, it seems, said nothing: he knew they would stop.

"No girl should be walkin' in all that grit in the road, with *no shoes*,"

Noah exclaimed, delighted. I had gotten into the truck bed with my red kerchief full of things, but Jeff had gotten out, and then silently gave me his hand. I was lifted down, red sack no shoes ribbon flying out, in to the inside of their truck. To ride with them.

We went to a square cottage by the train station, the roadside choking under flowers and weeds the entire way. On the edge of nowhere, but with a train nearby. Perfect.

I got out and stood by the front door on the porch, waiting. Unknotted the ribbon, and let it uncurl through my fingers, lazy and snakelike. Noah lifted himself out of the truck and over to the edge of their wild-weedy lawn, smacking and sweating and unrolling his rows of flesh, neck guts and hamthighs. I dropped my eyes to the ribbon in my hands, unrolling it and concentrating, *hard*. *It'll be OK, Cephie* — I shifted a leg, pads of flesh on my heels and toes rushing over the wood with no sound, just touch. *It'll be OK*.

They unclicked the porch screen door, and the wail and hiss of it drew me into my new home, silent and cool even in late midday summer. I went to the kitchen, found eggs, milk, skillet. Silver clatter and soft din of the stove knobs, the fridge, my feet, and the linoleum floor cracking underneath me. — They on the beatup green cushion couch and the bland six o'clock news' sounds on the TV. I was singing a little, welcoming them to my new home.

We ate quickly, omelettes and gravy and cold tea with paper napkins and round cracked-blue glasses. Noah smacked and grew greasier; I ran a hand through my hair and talked of the heat. Jeff cut and lifted, fork and knife and mouth, his eyes working. Pale blotchy blue-gray eyes, working me out and eating my food. I excused myself for the bathroom.

I dropped my panties in there and leaned on the toilet seat with my thighs, groaning lightly. I was working inside, too — working on them: the big one first. I'd wear the tan- and blue-striped flannel and nothing else. My cheeks were cold and I hadn't turned the bathroom light on. Cool and dark, pissing and — suddenly, freakishly — dreaming of my mother. Lordie.

I changed, right then. The gold wire spectacles, I thought, would do later; leave them off for now. At the other end of that square cottage, Noah's trough was scraping dry and Jeff would do his dishes. I got out his pen and sat on the tiled bathroom floor, in my panties again. I sat and drew all over my bare knees, little swirling dragons and daisy chains, hoping at that moment they'd leave, and knowing they wouldn't, ever.

Hours later I remember being sore and darkened, on my new double bed the thick window casement on the other wall. The heat had burst and melted with hot summer night rain all over the tree's fronds, outside. My hands rested on my stomach: There were no sheets on that mattress to cover

me, or to block me from floating, in my mind, all over the ceiling.

They were gone, gone to work. I lay quiet in the morning and listened to my body's own tickings and buzzes. The ceiling, stuccoed like hardened cottage cheese...

The days passed. I'm more fuzzy and less homespun in my memories, the more time slides by and through me, here in my square cottage with my two men, my two little boys. After the first night, I tore my eyes from that moldy cottage-cheese stucco on the ceiling and my ears from the thin sounds of tricycles, from the street outside my window. I went outdoors in an Army-Navy jersey, underpants and a strip of yellow cloth, torn from Noah's shirt of the night before, the rag catching up all of my hair at the neck.

The woodrot shed behind the house was bigger than the cottage and full of round, slightly dented cans of paint, lined neatly on thin knotty wood-plank shelves. I got two brushes, a thick and a thin one, and straddled the porch corner (this, five minutes or hours later) with mountains of paint-cans hoisted into a craggy mountain-range-type pile all over the side yard. I cracked each lid open and the blue firmament overhead, the black-green branches of the trees, lacey at the sky's edges, were quiet and watched over me.

The porch grew paint-slicked with chains of roses and thorns, soft cherub babies and wrinkle-designs interlocking into a netwebbing of old men's and women's faces. The background of my pictures was a bright paint-blue; a crumby streak of blue trailed my cheek and gummed ane loose curl of hair, free from the yellow cord tying the rest back. I was tired and happy.

They didn't mind so much when they came home, later — Noah obediently avoided the front door and beat the side steps down into the mud cheerfully, in his dither over my daub. Jeff sidled past him and towards the oilcloth-covered kitchen table, heavy with plates of hotdogs and mashed potatoes and marmalade jelly for our toast. When we placed all the spattered dishes into a tub of clean hot water after dinner, he tugged at my blue-crusty curl of hair and let a few more strands fall away, loose to the apples of my cheeks. He smiled gently at the goldrimmed spectacles I wore, then turned to the dishes, his job. I remember that. I remember how he met me that night, much later, in the kitchen: I was peering in the fridge with the lights all out. He leaned over the silent heavy door of the icebox and touched the crumbs of blue still caught in my hair from the daylight hours. His face leant towards mine over the floodlight of the refrigerator door, a circle of light with two heads and no sweaty fat anxious-to-please bodies, just a circle of pale on the crackling linoleum and all the rest dark. I remember that, too.

I've heard the old folks in the neighborhood, saying their saying, "The beginning makes for the end." It means however you begin is how you'll go on until the end, or until forever-and-ever dribbles out. It's true — the patterns fell into place with little comment, except from the outside. The neighborhood biddies were purple with gossip, insinuations, murmurs, disapproval. I held both their hands, Noah's and Jeff's, on our evening walks before dusk. I swung in a sundress or some knickers they bought me, between two *brothers*, as they said behind their curtains up and down each street of the neighborhood. I smiled at the violet curls of their rage, floating ominously behind us like mist as we passed. I smiled; I breathed it in for them to notice, so that they could billow their lace curtains with more fuming. *Fuck them, Cephie*, I encouraged, whispering through my teeth. *They don't know.*

The days passed, as I said before, like light through cotton. I have been with them four and a half years, as of last week. The porch and the railings are lost under inches of my paint, stripped each summer to make room for new Buddhas and wagons and curving bright scythes cutting the golden heads of grain: my latest thoughts, or arranging of thoughts. No one remarks on my pictures, and I don't think on them much either, when I'm through, except nights when I sit on the porch with the electric blue bulb and this pen.

In the corner of this year's mural is an oblong of brown — a paper bag, with ragged edges and bursts of crude vegetable colors sprouting from its top. It reminds me of my day at the market. The corner of the porch will not be stripped next year.

That day, the market day, I woke up still weak and smelling of the two of them, each from a different time that night. The smell and feel of it, their stains, were like ripening musty toadstools, growing in my leg and all over my belly, dried fumes like the fuming of our neighbors which hurt sometimes, if I let it. I scraped myself through the shower and then went out walking.

Two trains of dust and a subway's dirt later, I was there, filmed over in soot but in the market with a basket and a ribbon hanging loosely from one arm. The old ladies in mauve and gray passed; the fruits there were round and wonderful. I picked up each one into my palm, peaches and apples and plums and hairy little kiwis, each rolling through my fingers and then back to fake-grassy bed on the cart. I bought a red apple and some blueberries, expensive frosty good ones, to eat by myself later. I also bought a hat, a gargantuan straw-woven wonder to balance on my head. The whole contraption was woven through with pale-blue ribbon, locking the loose straw bits together in one large complicated weave.

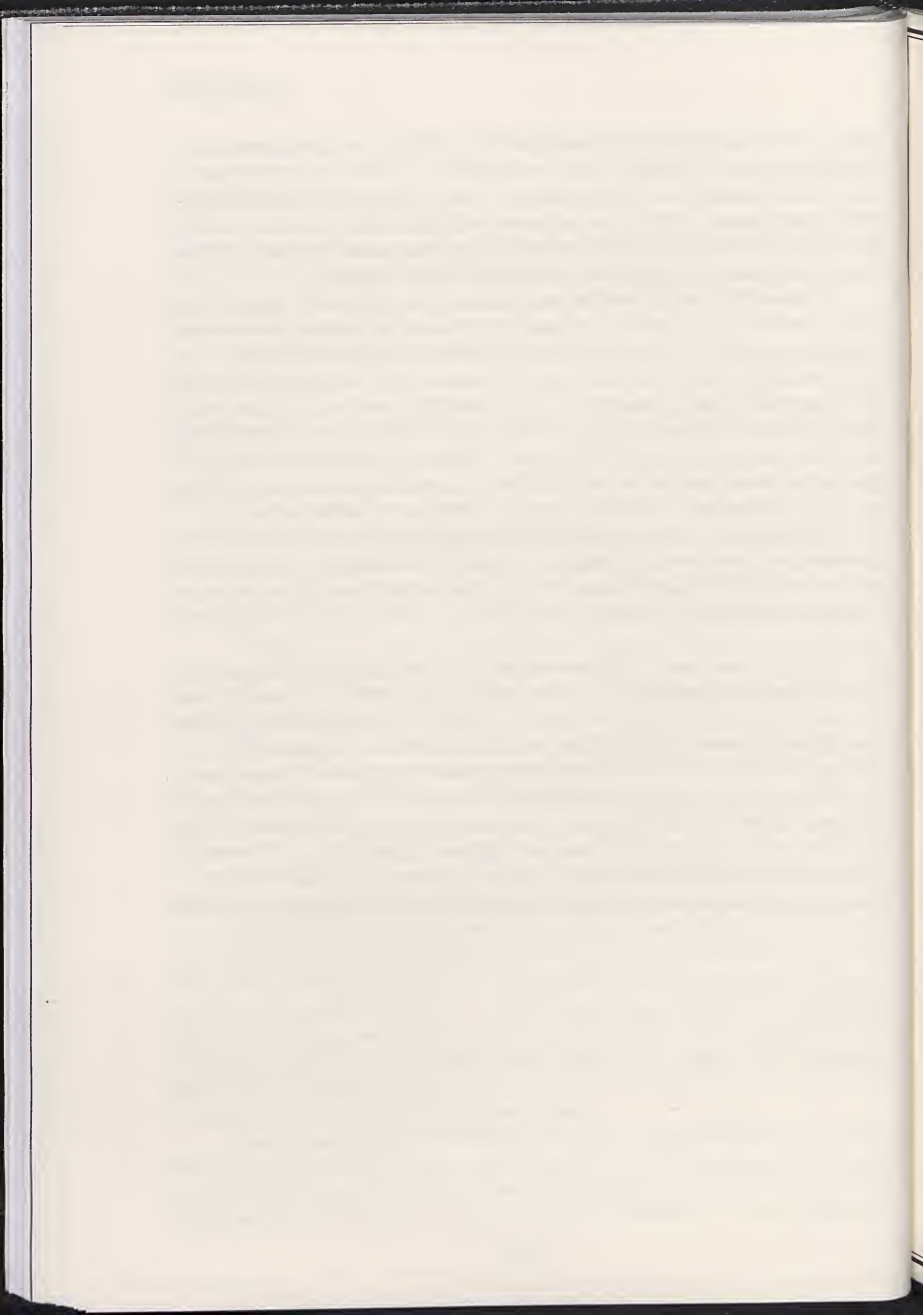
There was a buzz around me, growing, and more shades of violet from the neighborhood. The fat pale blue ribbon bunched around my hatbrim was dangling at the nape of my neck; the damn cheap thing was tinkering its way into pieces, unravelling into shreds the second I bought it. I was squeezing

the basket handle hard, waiting for that ribbon to drop away and unwind my huge strange hat into little bits at my feet. Ridiculous: it would be gleeful meat for the fuming ladies around me, and their gossip mill — *Cheap attracts cheap*, they'd fume: ... *girls, hats, all cheap*. No shoes, Noah had always said about me; Jeff had always said nothing. I remember standing there, feeling the slide of glossy cloth and wondering how far it would fall.

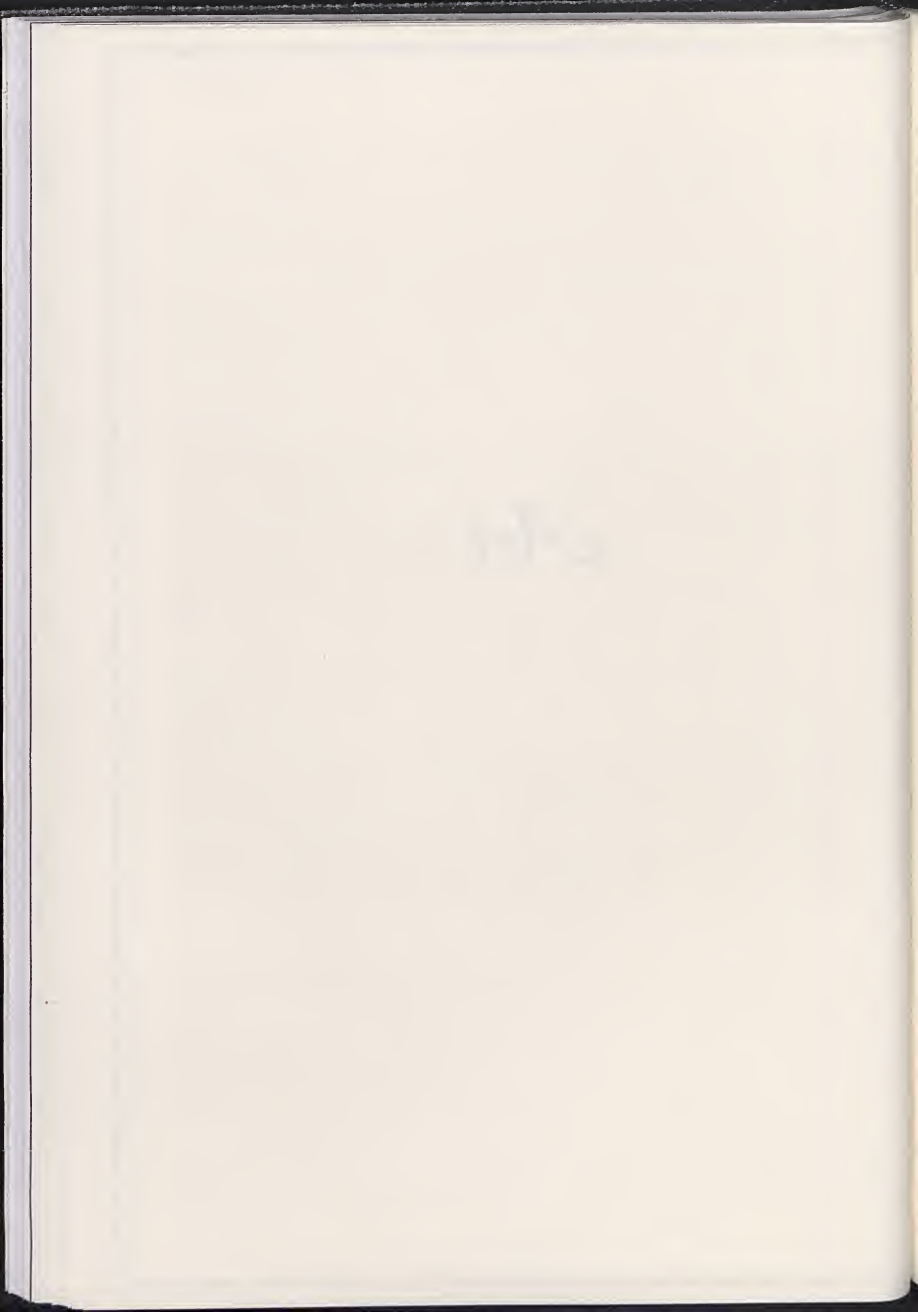
I looked down at my blueberry tin and the single red apple in my basket, saw my old narrow ribbon twining down from my wrist into the basket, between the fruits. *Stupid, stupid, all stupid this moment, Cephie*. My legs were still sore and my head was still buzzing with the market sounds, the ladies, the fuming ... the ribbon. the fat pale blue, slid and stopped at the top of my back. My fingers tingled up from my side to touch the hat, afraid to split the damn thing open ... all secure. I tightened the ribbon into a knot around my head, the ribbon strapped firmly around but comfortably, fitting me. I was in control: I decided to leave that ribbon and that hat on.

The ribbon curled softly with the wind at my bare back, the sky curved down over me and I laughed, busted up with such silly worries — *a hat*. After all, I still had blueberries in my basket, the rest of the afternoon before me, and even the brothers bringing the night to me, each in his way.

I went back home. The air was full with blue half-light and a child's feeling around suppertime. I remember being a child — a child is free, dangles from a jungle gym, wrestles Indians and practices flying in the clouds, really honestly, *truly*, all in one afternoon. Then, suppertime comes and someone calls you in. I hitched up my basket and fruit, all the ribbons, and held a hand to my head, balancing my hat as I walked up the porch steps. My eye caught the porch Lattice-work, that one hole still eaten away with woodrot and old age; Noah must have forgotten, again, to fix it. I'd seen his tools in my paintshed before, their steel a little rusty, but good enough. I could at least make it whole for now; it'd do the job, serve the purpose. — I



Art





Cooper Bane

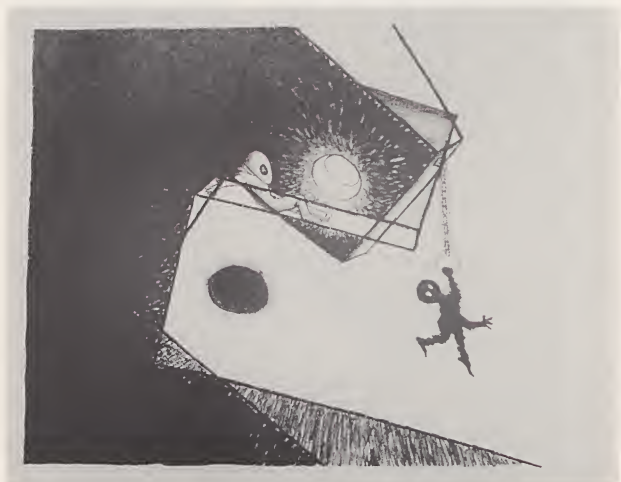


Cooper Bane



Mayan Gecko

Kari Hyatt

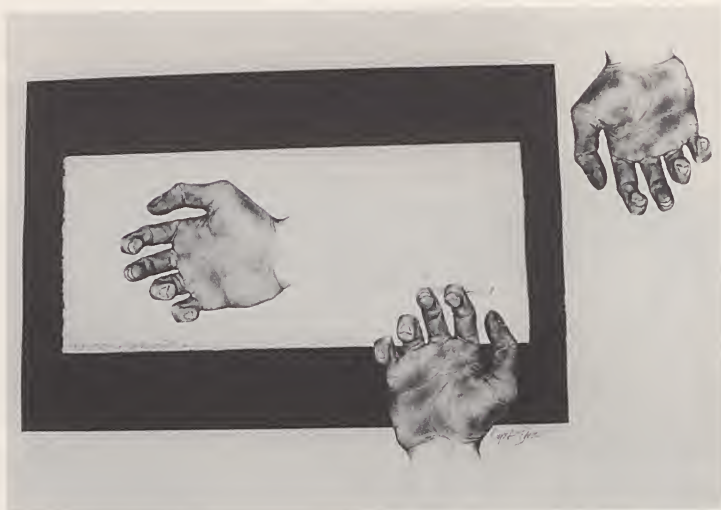


Chase Lawler



Bon a Tirer

Ryan Cook

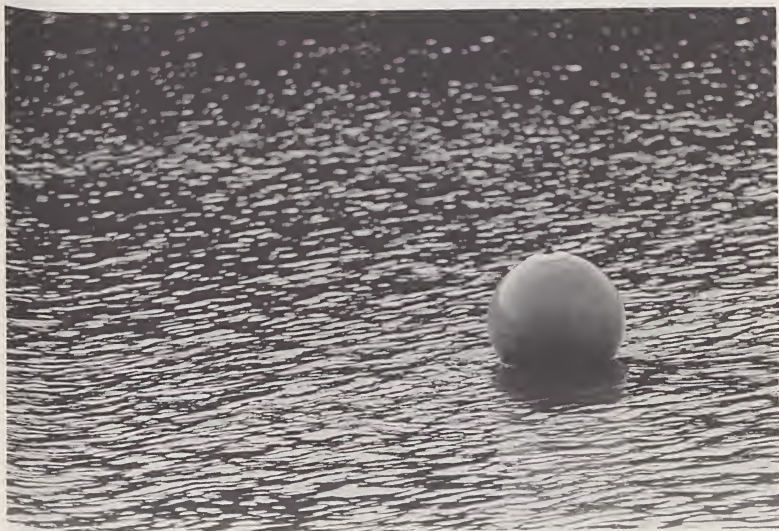


A Study in Sacrifice I

Cooper Bane

Photography

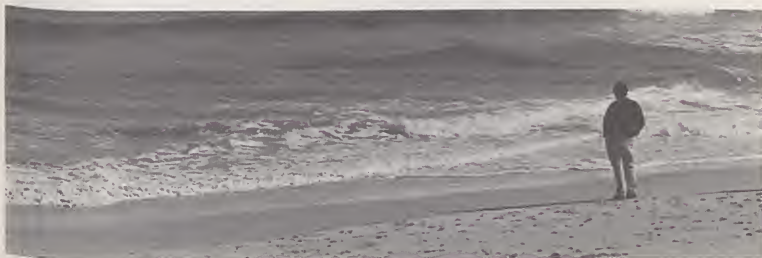




Jennifer Webb



Matt Phillips



Matt Phillips



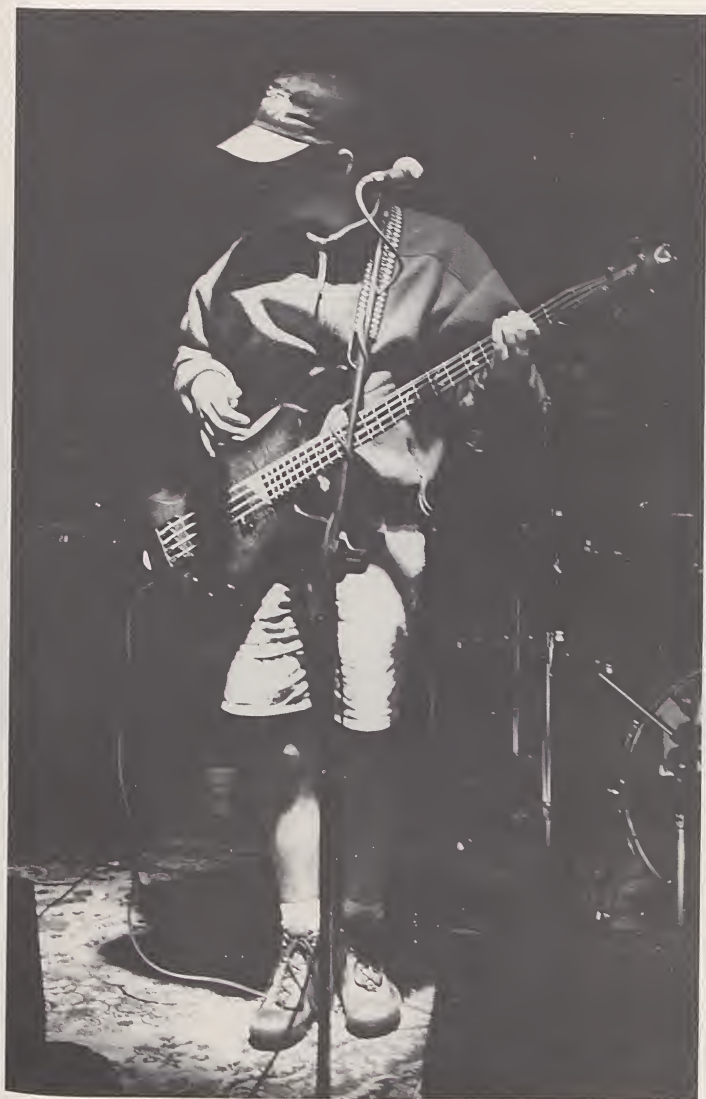
Jennifer Webb



Holly Tackett



Brian Mitchell



Kitty Meares



Jenny Cox



Holly Tackett



Kitty Meares



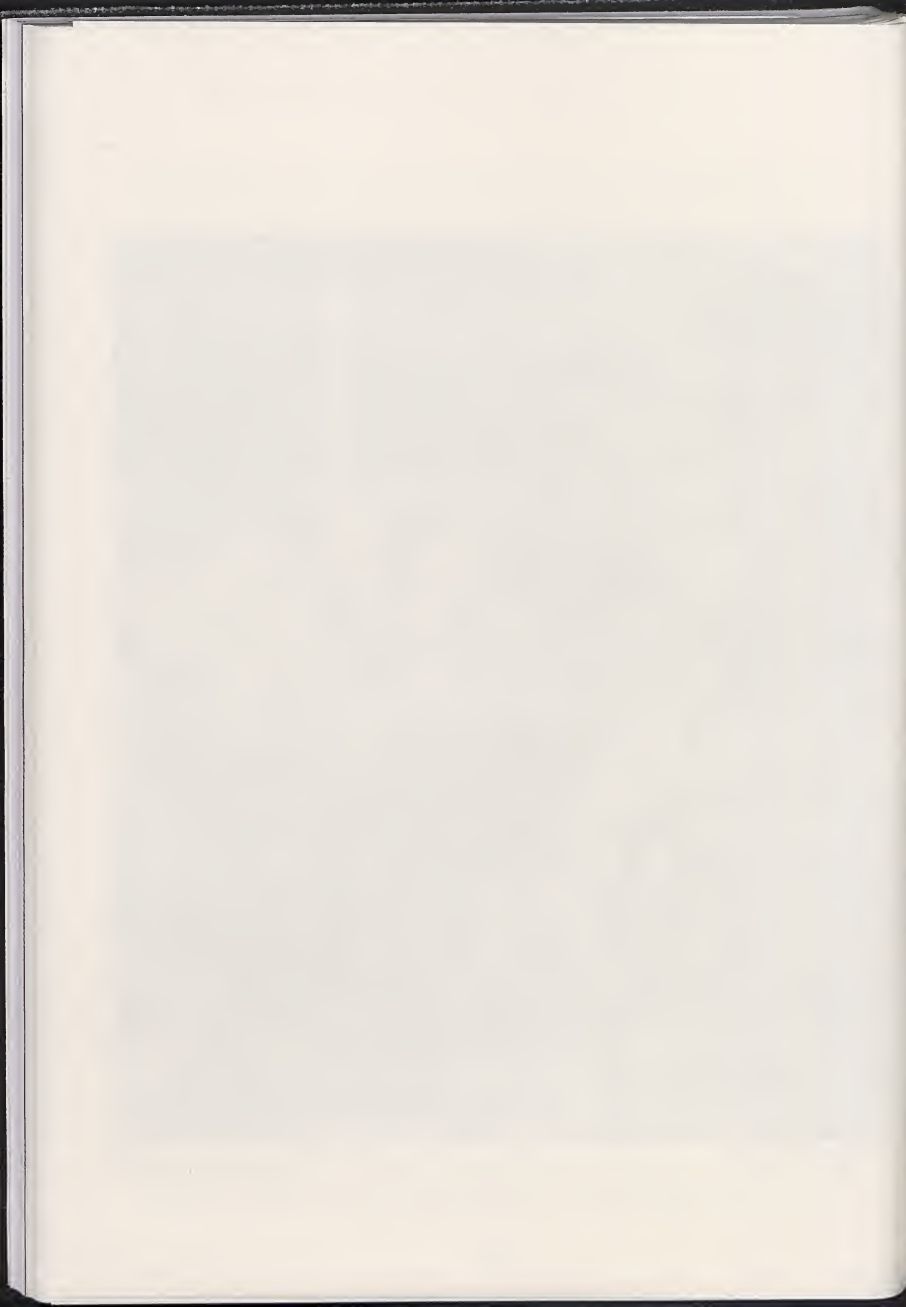
Tom Burnett



Melissa and Uncle John

Sara Harrington







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